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Contact: Chris Poehlmann, Friends of the Gualala River, (707) 886-5182
Victoria Brandon, Sierra Club Redwood Chapter, (707) 994-1931
Justin Augustine, Center for Biological Diversity, (415) 436-9682 x 302

Court Rejects Plan to Clearcut California Redwoods for Vineyard

SANTA ROSA, *Calif.* — Sonoma County Superior Court Judge Elliot Daum has rejected a plan to clearcut 154 acres of Northern California redwoods to plant vineyards for a winery. The proposal in northwestern Sonoma County was challenged by the Sierra Club's Redwood Chapter, the Center for Biological Diversity and Friends of the Gualala River. In response, Judge Daum said the state's "environmental impact report" for Artesa Winery's forest-to-vineyard project violates the California Environmental Quality Act.

"The highest and best use of coastal forests is to remain in their natural condition so they can protect our coastal rivers, support fish and wildlife, and combat climate change by sequestering carbon," said Victoria Brandon, chair of the Sierra Club Redwood Chapter.

The judge found that, in preparing the environmental review for the project, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) failed to properly analyze alternatives that would be less damaging to the environment, such as using an unforested area for the vineyard. The court also determined that the agency did not appropriately address the lost carbon sequestration that would result from destroying the redwood forest. Redwood forests are well known for their capacity to absorb massive amounts of greenhouse gases as they mature over time.

The judge also agreed with the conservation groups that the environmental report wrongly ignored California Board of Forestry policy regarding forest conversions. The board is charged with overseeing forest policy in California and opposes the conversion of prime timberland, like the project site. Finally, the court ruled that Cal Fire failed to properly address the project's pesticide impacts as well as the noise impacts.

"Rather than be destroyed to make room for a vineyard, this redwood forest will continue to do what it does best – provide habitat for wildlife and remove harmful carbon emissions from the atmosphere," said Justin Augustine, attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity.

"Sonoma County has already experienced a large-scale conversion of natural oak woodlands and inland forests to agriculture. We have drawn a line to stop further

destruction of redwood forests and salmon streams for more acres of grapes,” said Chris Poehlmann, president of Friends of the Gualala River.

The project is funded by Spanish company Codorniu S.A., the owner of Napa Valley’s Artesa Winery, and was approved by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

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The Sierra Club works to protect and restore wild places, public health and wildlife for future generations. The Redwood Chapter covers northwestern California.

Redwood.SierraClub.org

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 625,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

BiologicalDiversity.org

Friends of the Gualala River is a volunteer nonprofit group that advocates for preservation of the Gualala River watershed in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties.

GualalaRiver.org